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# CHRONOLOGICAL AGES OF 761 DELINQUENTS AT TIME OF INITIAL APPREHENSION

William C. Kvaraceus

The author is Assistant Superintendent of Schools in Passiac, N. J., in charge of curriculum, Research and Guidance. His article is an interpretation of the aggressive behavior of youth in terms of the frustrations of the adolescent.—Editor.

Various studies of age at time of first known delinquency have revealed that this type of aggression is engaged in at a very early age. The Gluecks, for example, reported "The mean age of first or early delinquency was nine years and seven months (A.D. 2.22)."<sup>2</sup> At the same time these investigators reported the mean age of first apprehension as 11 years and 11 months with an A.D. of two.

In a study of 761 Passaic delinquents composed of 563 boys and 198 girls who had been referred to the Passaic Children's Bureau during the last five years, an analysis of the ages of these delinquents at time of initial referral was made in an effort to gain further insight into the community's delinquency problem. A summary of the findings is presented in Table I.

TABLE I  
MEAN AGES OF 761 PASSAIC DELINQUENTS  
AT TIME OF INITIAL REFERRAL TO THE PASSAIC  
CHILDREN'S BUREAU

Statistics	Boys	Girls	Total
Mean .....	13.32 years	14.35 years	13.63 years
Sigma .....	2.34	1.99	2.34
Standard Error of M.....	0.09	0.14	0.03
N .....	563	198	761

The average age of the male delinquents at the time of referral was found to be 13.32 with sigma, 2.34 and 14.35 for girls with sigma of 1.99. Since this is the age of first referral and, hence, first apprehension, in all likelihood we may expect that in some cases this is not the age of the first offense. As reported by the Gluecks a lag of more than two years was found between the date of the first offense and the date of the first arrest.

Because of the nature of the Bureau organization in Passaic, less lag should be expected due to the place and method of handling the offenders. This is borne out somewhat by other data and by the large number of younger children who were referred to the Bureau. Of the boys and girls a third were found to be 12 years of age or less. When analyzed according to sex, 38 per cent of the boys and 20 per cent of the girls were found to be below or

<sup>2</sup>Sheldon Glueck and Eleanor T. Glueck, *One Thousand Juvenile Delinquents* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934), p. 95.

at the 12 year mark. As other studies point out, delinquent behavior is often noticeable at a very early age.

However, a majority of the delinquents were referred during the pre-adolescent, early adolescent, and middle adolescent periods, using the following table presented by Cole.<sup>2</sup>

Late childhood or pre-adolescence.....	10-12 years
Early adolescence .....	13-15 years
Middle adolescence .....	16-18 years

Recognizing that these periods of developments are not clear-cut and that individuals vary in their maturation according to their own rate of development, a consideration of the problems of this period of change may nevertheless, lend added insight into the frustrating and conflicting backgrounds of those children who manifested aggressive-delinquent behavior.

That the factor of rapid growth and physical change which is characteristic of this period may account for misbehavior in itself is hardly likely. Dearborn and Rothney in their report of the Harvard Growth Study found that "The rapid growth at adolescence need no longer be offered as an excuse for a slump in school performance."<sup>3</sup> They also reported that performance in mental tests and school achievement did not seem to have any significant relationship with the pubescent growth spurt. We cannot expect to blame misbehavior of the delinquent type upon the physical changes that occur during the pre-adolescent and middle adolescent periods. An answer is more likely to be found in the social and emotional conflicts that arise out of this period and which may be connected with the rapid growth and physical change indirectly.

In describing this period of adolescent change Cole writes:

In order to pass from childhood the adolescent must solve a number of problems. He must develop heterosexual interests; he must become free from home supervision, he must achieve economic and intellectual independence and learn how to use his leisure time; he must make new emotional and social adjustments to reality, and he must begin to evolve a philosophy of life.<sup>4</sup>

If we consider these conflicting and new demands which face the delinquent in terms of the aggressive behavior for which he was characterized as delinquent, we may gain a better understanding of this type of behavior response in terms of the frustrations of the adolescent and pre-adolescent period.

Much of the heterosexual conduct and aberrant sex behavior of boys and girls during this period is without doubt a natural exploration of new powers and capacities as well as new experi-

<sup>2</sup>Luella Cole, *Psychology of Adolescence*, (New York: Farrar and Reinhart, Inc., 1942), p. 6.

<sup>3</sup>W. F. Dearborn and John Rothney, *Predicting the Child's Development* (Boston: Sci-Arts Press, 1941), p. 343.

<sup>4</sup>L. Cole, *Ibid*, p. 13.

ences for which the adolescent is ready, but which socio-economic and religious forces deny him. Stealing, which is found so frequently among boys and girls, may be an expression of the desire to become economically independent and to participate in the adult experiences most of which have a commercial flavor. The aggressive-delinquent behavior characterized as ungovernable and runaway behavior is a direct and obvious attempt on the part of the delinquent to emancipate himself from the inner circle of his family. The social nature of the delinquent-aggression pattern points to a conflict between the values found in some of the homes and in the community as against those held up by the gang. The fact that the delinquents are reported as leaving school as soon as the law would allow, suggests a strong urge toward economic independence which is frustrated by school laws, child labor laws, or lack of job opportunities.

There is much evidence that suggests the adolescent period with its many conflicts and frustrations to be a prominent factor predisposing the child toward delinquent-aggressive behaviors. At the same time, it must be recognized that delinquent-aggression may be engaged in by some juveniles at a very early age.

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